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ABSTRACT

Today there are more than a million children whose parents follow the crops for a living. Since their families move so often, these children are never in one school long enough to have a chance to really learn. Complicating matters, many of them can't speak English. Congress recognized the migrant child's special educational needs in November 1966 when it amended the Elementary and Secondary Education Act Title I, giving the U.S. Office of Education (USOE) authority and funds to improve the educational programs and offer supplementary services for the migrant child. Today, Title I serves approximately 400,000 children at a cost of over $90 million. In 1974, the use of the Migrant Student Record Transfer System was authorized to trace the whereabouts of each child as he migrates from one harvest to another. Although progress has been significant since the enactment of the 1966 amendment, USOE is constantly seeking new and better ways to help the migrant child move out of the fields and into more rewarding occupations. Among its future plans are: (1) a career education program for K-12 and (2) endorsement of interstate cooperation. As more and more migrants leave the stream, the migrant education program will focus more on the 5-year-old child--the child who stays in one spot but still needs special help. (NQ)

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TITLE I MIGRANT EDUCATION PROGRAM

Nine out of 10 children of migrant farm workers never enter high school and only 1 out of 10 of those who do ever graduates.

The Nation has more than a million children whose parents follow the sun, picking fruits and vegetables in fields from Florida to Maine, Mississippi to Michigan, California to Washington State. They are born into some of the grimmest poverty in the country. They suffer from illnesses such as rickets, scurvy, pinworms, anemia, and malnutrition. They are isolated from the communities near their work. By 12 or 13 years of age they join their parents in the fields and spend the rest of their lives topping onions, pulling sugar beets, and snapping tomatoes from the vine.

Children of migrant workers seldom go past 4th or 5th grade, and since their families move so often--every few weeks at the peak of the harvest season--they are never in one school long enough to have a chance to really learn. Some never enter a classroom because they have to babysit for their younger brothers or sisters or, what is more often the case, they must work in the field because even their meager earnings are needed to help feed the family. To make matters worse, many of them can't speak English.

School records seldom move with the child; too many families stay only briefly in one place, moving on as a crop runs out or the weather hastens ripening. When the new school asks the child the name of the town and last school he attended, he knows only that he's come "from the potatoes" or "from the snap beans." State and city boundaries mean little to him or to his parents.

As a result, school officials seldom know the proper grades in which to place most migrant children. Furthermore, their health records are unknown. It may take several weeks of testing to place a child, and by that time the child is off to another school, another period in limbo, and, worse yet, another wasteful series of inoculations and eye tests.

There is never time to develop special education programs for migrant children. Besides, who really knows their needs? There is virtually no chance to get acquainted with them, to provide love and understanding; they are strangers in their schools.

In sum, the problems of the migrant child are many; the solutions difficult.

THE LAW MADE THE DIFFERENCE

The special educational needs of children of migratory agricultural workers were recognized by Congress in November 1966 when it amended title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The amendment (Public Law 89-750) gave the U.S. Office of Education authority and funds to improve educational programs and offer supplementary services for these children.

Since its inauguration in fiscal year 1967, the title I migrant program has expanded to encompass all 50 States, Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the Virgin Islands, and the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. Today, it serves approximately 400,000 children at a cost of over $90 million.

The money goes to State departments of education, which, in turn, assess needs and then make allocations to local school districts or other eligible applicants serving migrant children. Each year's allotment is based on a formula that takes into account the number of migrant children served in a State and per pupil expenditures.

Title I migrant programs concentrate on identifying and meeting the specific needs of migrant children. Continuity of instruction is a top priority with special focus on the individual educational problems of each child. And because you can't teach a hungry child, lunches, snacks--even breakfasts--are provided. Nutrition lessons are taught in the schools; health problems handled. If a child can't see properly, he is given eye glasses. If he has trouble hearing, the source of the trouble is sought and a remedy, if possible, provided. Health, nutrition, and psychological services figure high on the priority lists of title I migrant program directors. So, too, do cultural development and prevocational training and counseling.

Each year since the inception of the program funding for these educational services has increased--from approximately $10 million in fiscal year 1967 to $92 million in fiscal year 1975:

Fiscal Year	Allocations
1967	$ 9,737,847
1968	41,692,425
1969	45,556,074
1970	51,014,319
1971	57,608,680
1972	64,822,926
1973	72,772,187
1974	78,331,437
1975	91,953,160

The number of participating children has also increased--from 80,000 to the current 400,000. Yet an estimated 600,000 children remain unserved.

In 1974, Public Law 93-380 extended the migrant program to include children of migratory fishermen--those who move from place to place catching fish for commercial purposes and those working in the fish processing industry. How many children are involved, no one knows. The States are now making surveys. Calendar year 1975 is being devoted to recruiting the children of migrant fishermen and enrolling them in the program. These youngsters will receive the same special services as do the children of migrant agricultural workers.

In both instances, the children may participate in the program for 5 years after their families stop migrating. This is because they continue to need special educational services to assist them in becoming full-fledged members of their new communities. For many of them it will be their first opportunity to receive a full year of uninterrupted schooling.

THE COMPUTER FOLLOWS THE CHILD

P.L. 93-380 also authorizes the use of the Migrant Student Record Transfer System (MSRTS). The heart of the system is a central computer data bank (located in Little Rock, Arkansas) which can trace the whereabouts of each child as he migrates from one harvest to another. The MSRTS produces the official count of migrant children.

When the title I migrant education program was authorized by the Congress, no one really knew how many migrant children there were or even where they were. True, some did go to school, but they usually arrived at the door with no records and little recollection of where they had been. The MSRTS is significantly changing this.

It took 30 months for all the States to agree on what information should be included in the records of these children. There was the matter of privacy to be considered and the extent of the information needed. In the end, it was agreed that each record should contain the child's name, sex, birthday, and birthplace; his math and reading scores from the last four schools he attended; and coded information on health examinations and a variety of childhood diseases. A child's record can be supplied to school officials and health authorities within 4 to 24 hours after a request is made.

The MSRTS makes student placement easier and indicates where special help is needed. It eliminates multiple testing and physical examinations. It enables school officials to place the migrant child at the proper grade level in whatever school he enrolls within a day of his arrival.

And in at least one instance, it saved lives. In 1973 the MSRTS was used to find more than 200 children who were potential victims or carriers of typhoid fever. The network was called into play after more than 130 persons became ill with typhoid, apparently as the result of drinking contaminated water at a migrant labor camp in Homestead, Florida. By the time the outbreak was discovered, hundreds of people who had been exposed to the disease had left the area for work elsewhere. Thanks to the computer network, 232 children--and through them their families--were located within 48 hours. The data bank had traced the children to other parts of Florida and to Texas, Georgia, and Alabama.

EXAMPLES OF PROGRESS

Progress in migrant education has been significant since the enactment of the 1966 amendment to title I, ESEA. Federal funds have made it possible not only to give greater attention to the needs of migrant children but also to put into practice a variety of innovative, creative ideas. For example--

Florida.--One summer a cadre of 45 Florida teachers followed the eastern migrant stream for 6 weeks, visiting labor camps, schools, and work areas. As the field workers harvested the fruits and vegetables, the teachers harvested facts about their children.

So that others, too, could benefit from their experience, the Florida teaching cadre produced a film showing what it's like to be a child of the road. They developed and published teaching materials for use by others who work with migrant children. The sights and sounds of their travels became the basis for activity-centered programs for the migrant children who winter in Florida and attend school there.

California.--Each summer this State recruits some 200 young people with 1 or more years of college to work in the title I migrant program. Organized into a Mini-Corps, they assist in the classroom, initiate camp projects, and serve as liaison between the migrant community and the school. They also teach English to adults and serve as models for the younger children.

At the end of the summer the Mini-Corpsmen meet to evaluate their experiences. Almost invariably they say they have changed their attitudes about migrants, want to come back the following summer, and intend to devote their lives to teaching--especially to teaching the disadvantaged.

New Jersey.--It's a far cry from field work to employment in factories and offices. Recognizing this fact, the New Jersey Department of Education has set up a mobile industrial training unit for migrant youth. The unit consists of a trailer with a simulated office and an industrial assembly line. It operates 12 months of the year, serving five migrant education centers and 10 school districts throughout the State.

Here migrant young people are taught everything they need to know about getting and staying on a regular job. Training begins with the initial phone call inquiring about the job opening (few migrant children know how to use a phone) followed by an actual interview that is video taped and then critiqued. The youth is then hired, told how to operate a time clock, and told the importance of punctuality and dependability. Thereupon he or she starts on-the-job training, learning all the skills required for an assembly line or office job. At the end of the program, trainees receive their paychecks, plus instructions on how to open a bank account, pay their bills, budget, and systematically save.

The program takes 2 to 4 weeks with 24 students attending each day. So far it has helped an estimated 500 migrants successfully move from backbreaking field work to jobs offering increased income, prestige, and rapid advancement.

There are other stories of how the Federal migrant education program has given people the hope, the incentive, and the knowledge to get out of the migrant stream.

Maria M. is in her late teens. For almost as long as she can remember, she traveled each summer with her family from Puerto Rico to upstate New York. While her family worked on a fur farm, she participated in a title I ESEA migrant education program. When she was 16, Maria was trained as a classroom aide to work in the title I summer program. That fall she enrolled as a senior in the local high school and became its first migrant graduate. Maria is now enrolled in college in Puerto Rico. Her goal: to become a teacher.

The family of Julia G. also looks toward a brighter future--thanks to the migrant education program. Mrs. G., recently widowed at 46, has long realized that the only way to keep her 12 children from following in the occupational footsteps of their father is to help them get an education. When she heard about the migrant education program in Billings, Montana, where the family helped harvest sugar beets each summer, she sent her children to school rather than to the fields. And she insisted they go each day, despite the serious loss in family income.

Mrs. G.'s eldest daughter has now graduated from college; her eldest son is married and going to college; another daughter is training to be a nurse. Mrs. G. herself has been attending night classes so that she may qualify for the General Education Development (GED) test. She goes to school after working all day in the fields because she, too, wants a high school diploma and the opportunity for a better, more rewarding future.

THE FUTURE IS NOW

But these are accomplishments of the past. What of the future?

The Office of Education is constantly seeking new and better ways to help migrant children and youth--in fact, to move them out of the fields and into more rewarding occupations.

A career education program is now being developed that will span kindergarten through 12th grade. It will give migrant children a picture of what occupations and professions lie beyond the vegetable fields and fruit orchards. It will introduce to them, grade by grade, the basic skills necessary to obtain meaningful, stable employment. It will show them which skills are needed for certain occupations and then help them gain these skills. Through guidance and counseling, migrant children will be able to arrive at realistic decisions about their future and will be more likely to achieve their occupational goals.

Also, if their parents should stop their migrations, these children will continue to be helped. In the years ahead, as more and more migrants leave the stream, title I's migrant education program will focus more and more on the 5-year child--the child who stays in one spot but still needs special help.

This change in focus is resulting in another shift in program emphasis. For years migrant children have filtered through rural schools. The new settling-in trend is now bringing migrants to our cities, and the urban school is becoming the new educational arena of the migrant child. So it is here that the title I migrant education program also must turn its attention.

But there are still hundreds of thousands of children who will continue to follow the sun as their parents harvest the crops--children who never stay in one State long enough to receive credit for their studies or to successfully complete any total course of study. For the highschooler, in particular, this has been a major problem. Now specific steps are being taken to remedy this situation. As a beginning, the Office of Education is analyzing and grouping courses offered in various States so that migrant children can receive proper course credit for classroom attendance wherever they are. The effort is expected to significantly alter the traditional credit system and permit the involvement of all States in providing a more realistic response to the special needs of the migrant child. However, which courses will constitute a diploma "core" and which schools will award the diploma are still under discussion.

All this will require considerable interstate cooperation. To benefit the migrant child, all States must work together, capitalizing upon the successes and failures of the others. The National Advisory Council on the Education of Disadvantaged Children firmly endorses interstate cooperation. In 1973 "cooperation" was designated as a top priority. Already schools are beginning to pool their expertise and to specialize in the education of teachers with skills and insights that permit them to identify effectively with migrant children.

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